

Remap plan puts Dixon, Roy in same House district

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BATON ROUGE — State House representatives and local officials from Alexandria and Pineville on Thursday argued against attempts to place Democratic Reps. Chris Roy Jr. and Herbert Dixon in the same House district.

The plan they opposed also would have a Natchitoches House member represent much of Rapides Parish, including England Airpark and Alexandria International Airport.

The panel overseeing House redistricting did not vote on that and other changes in the principal redistricting bill because the bill's author —

House Speaker Jim Tucker — was called away Thursday from the State Capitol on an emergency.

The House and Governmental Affairs Committee is scheduled to meet today to resume debate and maybe vote on the amendments and plan if Tucker returns to the Capitol. Committee Chairman Rep. Rick Gallot said if Tucker is not available today, the panel instead would start talks on drawing new lines for the Public Service Commission and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.



Dixon



Roy

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House

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The Legislature is completing the first week of a special session to redraw political boundaries statewide after the 2010 Census.

If the new House remap proposal is approved, Roy would find himself living in a minority district that would include much of Alexandria.

Dixon would lose some of the black residents in his district, going from 78 percent minority to 60 percent. He also would lose the Pineville side of the Red River, which the minority district now straddles. Both Roy and Dixon are Democrats.

The plan also calls for Alexandria International Airport and England Airpark to be in a House district which is currently represented by Republi-

can Rep. Rickey Nowlin of Natchitoches.

The district now held by Rep. Billy Chandler of Dry Prong, who recently switched to the Republican Party, would take some of north Rapides. Another district would move into Rapides from the west. Republican Chris Hazel, R-Ball, would retain much of his district.

Among those opposing the newest plan were Alexandria Mayor Jacques Roy, who is Chris Roy Jr.'s brother, Pineville Mayor Clarence Fields and Central Louisiana economic development officials Rick Ranson and Jim Clinton.

Rep. Roy said Rapides having more representatives from other parishes, contrary to what's being said behind closed doors, will not help the parish.

"You now have persons and communities that have never been together, now being placed together when it makes absolutely

no sense," Rep. Roy said. "I implore you to look at this real close."

He also issued a warning: moving two Democrats into a minority district could bring unwanted and expensive challenges from the U.S. Department of Justice, which reviews redistricting plans of Louisiana and some other states with histories of racial voting discrimination.

Mayor Roy said having a person from Natchitoches representing local landmarks such as the England Authority and Alexandria International Airport would be a problem. He also said the plan doesn't make sense population-wise.

"Why are we talking about losing a representative when our population

has gained?" Roy said. "The center of the state is sort of becoming a dumping ground for fixing everybody else's problems."

Mayors Roy and Fields said both cities work together and should be joined by common representation, as they are in economic endeavors and legal fights such as the lawsuit against the federal government that Roy said helped halt a flood map plan by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

When the committee adjourned because of Tucker's absence, Dixon said he would work the phones to defeat the remap proposal.

"I will be expressing my concern throughout the night with colleagues," he said.